

Subject: Active Army, Reserves, and Organized Militia.

Reduction in strength of Libyan Militia (Black Shirts)

Creation of 4 territorial Militia Legions in Libya.

FEB 7 1935 Carlo.

This report modifies Chapter XXIII, page 16, 17AIN No. 12985-6020, June 20, 1932.

Up to the present time the Militia organization in Libya consisted of 2 permanent Libyan Legions (composed of about 3000 Italian soldiers and 70 officers). There also existed 2 territorial cohorts in Libya (headquarters at Tripoli and Bengasi) for organizing and training militia reserves.

On December 16, 1934, the press amounced a reduction in the strength of the Libyan Militia, the 2 Legions being cut to 2 battalions. On the other hand, the territorial organization has been extended to include 4 territorial legions with headquarters at the 4 provincial commissariats, which, as reported in ITALY No. 14102-5030, October 30, 1934, are situated at Tripoli, Misurata, Bengasi and Derna.

The officially reported strength of officer personnel of the 2 Libyan battalions is as follows:

The enlisted strength of the 2 battalions is estimated at about 700 - 800 men.

The reduction in the strength of the Libyan Militia strength is attributed to the complete pacification of the colony. The creation of 4 territorial legions in Libya is of special interest because it indicates that the organization of Italian reservists will be handled by the Militia instead of by the Army authorities. The first attempt to organize reserves in Libya was made in September, 1953 and was reported by this office in ITALY No. 13611-6010, November 17, 1933.

Chronological notes on the Libyan Militia.

The first Fascist Militia units made their appearance in Libys in September 1923 when 3 combat legions landed at Tripoli to assist in dominating the rebellion of the native tribes. The 3 legions took part in several combat actions, and in 1924, after 10 months service, they were ordered back to Italy and replaced by 2 permanent legions, one for Tripolitania and the other for Cyrenaica, organized as strictly military units.

In 1931 the military conquest of Libya was accomplished with the capitulation of the last Semussite chiefs. The legions were thus gradually transformed into colonizing units, cultivating thousands of acres of land, building roads and bridges.

With the reduction of the Libyan Eilitia strength from 3000 to about 800 men, those discharged from active duty with the Legions will be given land for colonization, and added to the list of reservists inscribed in the newly organized territorial legions.

8650.20/2

DOCUMENT FILE

NOTE

SEE	765.84/1217	FOR #589	2pm
FROM	Italy	(Sept.18, 1935
то		NAME	1—1127 •••

REGARDING:

Unconfirmed report received states that the Assieta and Cosseria regular army divisions are beling diverted to Libya by Italian government. Reported that detachments have already arrived at Bengasi and Derna.

ME NE

MJP
This telegram must be closely paraphrased before being communicated to anyone. (A)

Rome

Dated September 18, 1935 Rec'd 8:20 a. m.

Secretary of State, Washington.

589, September 18, 2 p. m.
My 445, August 6, 3 p. m.

An unconfirmed report has been received that the Assieta and Cosseria regular army divisions are being diverted to Libya and that detachments have already arrived at Bengasi and Derna with September 21 as the estimated date for completing the operation. The total estimated strength of these divisions is 34,000 men. Please inform War Department.

LONG

CSB

(121)

note 8650.00

DOCUMENT FILE

NOTE

FROM .Italy (Long) DATED September 26, 1935.

TO NAME 1-1127 ...

REGARDING: Italo-Ethiopian controversy. Military Attache corroborates the general understanding that troops have been sent in considerable quantities to Libya, probably landing at Bengazi.

MJP

This telegram must be closely paraphrased before being communicated to anyone. (B)

Rome

Dated September 26, 1935 Rec'd 7:18 a. m.

Secretary of State,

Washington.

617, September 26, 1 p. m.

Confidential.

Information furnished by the Military Attache corroborates the rather general understanding that troops have been sent in considerable quantities to Libya and landed probably at Bengazi. The Military Attache estimates that not less than nine thousand troops have been landed. From various sources my belief is that two divisions full war strength totalling forty thousand men have been landed in northeast Libya, probably Bengazi, within the last week but this is not confirmed.

Ten transports fully loaded with men and material are scheduled follow from Naples today and five more tomorrow.

LONG

HPD

741.65 8650.20

D 202 6120.6 WAR DEPARTMENT

FIFTED Report. AUG 2 1 1936

DEPARTMENT OF STATE RECEIVED AUG 21 1936 DIVISION OF CHAMUALLALIUMS AND

ITALY (COMBAT - ARMY). Subject:

Matribution of Troops.

DIVISION OF WESTERN AUG 19 1936

DEPARTMENT OF STATE Organization of a 7th Black Shift Division ("Circue") in LIBYA.

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Several references have recently been made in the Italian press to the 7th Black Shirt Division ("Cirene") in LIBYA. So far as this office knows, the "Girene" Division was not organized in Italy. For the Abyssinian compaign, 6 Black Shirt Divisions were organised in Italy and sent to Mast Africa, but only separate Black Shirt battalions and other small units were sent from Italy to LIBYA.

Referring to our Report No. 15,231, which gives a station list of troops in LIBYA as of Merch 20, 1936, it will be noted that the list includes no Black Shirt Division. It is presumed that the "Girene" Division has lately been formed from Black Shirt unite temperarily employed in LIBYA (See last paragraph of Report No. 15.231).

The "MESSAGERO" of July 29th notes the death, near BENGASI, in an automobile socident, of Lieut. General Guide Scandolars, a volunteer in Africa, commanding the 7th Black Shirt Division ("Cirene"). General Scandelara was a Brigadier General in the Regular Army and has held, semengisther speaktions, command of the Black Shirts in SARDINIA.

> J. G. PILLOW. Colonel, Cavalry, U.S.A., Military Attache.

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56.20/

From: M. A. Rome, Italy.

Report No. 15.427.

July 29, 1936.

MID Report

Miss

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WAR DEPARTMENT

CONFIDENTIAL

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
RECEIVED

JAN 6 - 1938
DIVISION OF BROOKS

MINIMIDATIONS AND RECORDS

Subject : Distribution of Troops

Italian Troops in Libya, and French Troops in Tunisia.

The Chief of the 2nd Bureau, War Department, General Staff, French Army, stated to the undersigned that the Italians now had seventy thousand troops in Libya. That this force consisted of the XX and XXI Army Corps of two completely motorised divisions each, and of 25,000 native troops.

When asked what measures had been made or were to be made by the French to counter the Italian move, he stated that the last reinforcements sent to Yunisia consisted of 1 regiment of Tirailleurs Sénégalais which was sent there early in 1936. That the French did not contemplate sending additional troops.

A high ranking general officer on the General Staff stated that the next war would be fought on many fronts and that one could well forsee the transportation of French metropolitan troops to Northern Africa rather than the reverse as was the case during the last war where North African troops were transported to France. That the next war could very well commence in Libya. That if Italy aligned herself with Germany the first objective would be to smash Italy.

The following French troops are now in Tunisia :

Staff of the Commanding General of the troops in Tunisia - TUNIS

Infantry

1st Brigade of Infantry of Tunisia: Staff - TUNIS
4th regiment of Zouaves - TUNIS, LE REF
8th regiment of Tunisian Tirailleurs - BIZERTE, AIN DRAHAME
10th Regiment of Senegalese Tirailleurs - LA GOULETTE, TUNIS,
BIZERTE.

2nd Brigade of Infantry of Tunisia: Staff - SOUSSE, CAMP SERVIERE.
4th Regiment of Tunisian Tirailleurs - SOUSSE, CAMP SERVIERE.
KAIROUAN, BIR-BOU-REKE

18th Regiment of Senegalese Tirailleurs - GABES
5th Regiment of Senegalese Tirailleurs - SFAK, MONASTIR
1st battalion of light african infantry - TATAHOUINE

61st Battalion of Tanks - BIZERTE

Cavalry

Cavalry Brigade of Tunis: Staff - TUNIS

4th regiment of Chasseurs d'Afrique - TUNIS

4th Regiment of Tunisian Spahis - ZARZIS, DAMAS

Ist Foreign Regiment of Cavalry - SOUSSE, SIDI-IL-HANI

From: M. A. Paris

Report 23,892-W

December 6, 1937.

20/5

Art illery

Staff of Commanding General of the Artillery
in Tunisia - TUNIS
62nd Artillery Regiment (horse-drawn) - TUNIS, BIZERTE,
LA MANOUBA, GABES
Independent battalion of Tunisia - SOUSSE

Engineers

Colonel Commanding the Engineers in Tunisia - TUNIS 34th Battalion of Engineers - BIZERTE

Aviation

Headquarters of Aviation in Tunisia - Staff - TUNIS 32nd Aorial Brigade : Staff - BIZERTE 5th independent pursuit group - BIZERTE 25th Bombing Wing - BIZERTE.

Source: Personal contact & Emplacement des Troupes

H. H. FUZNER
Lt. Colonel, F.A.
Military Attaché

HHF /od

PAPER:

DAILY HERALD

NUMBER:

CITY:

LONDON

DATE: SEP

Italy's N. African Colony Vast rmy Base

BY, OUR OWN CORRESPONDENT

CAIRO, Tuesday.

MUSSOLINI'S generals are rapidly turning Libya, the Italian colony in North Africa, which lies between Egypt and French-owned Tunis, into

a vast military base.

Officials here refuse to discuss the matter, but reliable information I have received both that indicates Tunisian and Egyptian frontiers of Libya are now the scene of unprecedented military activity.

Italy is reported to be sending an army corps to Libya in the autumn, but native troops are also being

actively recruited.

Askari forces, hitherto stationed on the coast, are now being sent inland and will be replaced by the Italians when they arrive.

Mechanised Units

Big sums are being spent on barracks and underground munition dumps, and new mechanised units are being organ-ised on lines specially adapted for desert

These units are extremely mobile, and consist of one-third aviation, one-third mechanised infantry, and one-third camel corps.

A new military road is being rapidly pushed forward southward from Tobruk, on the coast to the Sudan border.

Along its length air bases are being built, at Jarabub, Kufra and Owelnat, officially for a new "commercial air line" to Abyssinia, passing over the Sudan Sudan.

Jarabub faces an easy path of pene-tration into Egypt and Oweinat one into the Sudan.

Forbidden Area

Kufra, whose secrets the Italian officials are jealously guarding, is now a prohibited area to foreigners.

The new road, dotted with fortified supply dumps, will allow for the high-speed transport of Italian troops along the entire frontier, whereas on the Egyptian side there are merely random camel tracks

camel tracks.

On Libya's Tunisian frontier a big military base is being planned at Ghariam, 60 miles south of Tripoli

GRAVE discontent has been aroused among the Libyan frontier tribesmen, especially on the Tunisian border, as the result of the Italian army's preparation.

They are being forced to evacuate their usual pastures owing to the military works; their movements are severely restricted and breaches of the regulations are punished with heavy penalties.

But on the other side of the border, parties of Arabic-speaking Italians are making regular motor trips into the desert from Cairo and impressing the ignorant Bedouins with Italy's "friendship" for them.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE DIVISION OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS

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No. 1969

To the American Chargé d'Affaires ad interim, London.

The Secretary of State transmits for the information of the Charge d'Affaires a copy of an article which appeared in the London <u>Daily Herald</u> of September 8, 1937, concerning recent Italian military activity in Lybia.

The Charge d'Affaires is requested to forward at his convenience such information as he may be able discreetly to obtain concerning the activity to which the article makes reference.

A similar instruction is being sent to the Chargé d'Affaires at Rome and the Chargé d'Affaires ad interim at Cairo.

Enclosure:

Article from London Daily Herald, September 8, 1937.

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No. 191

To the American Chargé d'Affaires ad interim, Rome.

The Secretary of State transmits for the information of the Charge d'Affaires a copy of an article which appeared in the London Daily Hereld of September 8, 1937, concerning recent Italian military activity in Lybia.

The Chargé d'Affaires is requested to forward at his convenience such information as he may be able discreetly to obtain concerning the activity to which the article makes reference.

A similar instruction is being sent to the Charge d'Affaires at London and the Charge d'Affaires ad interim at Cairo.

Enclosure:

Article from London Daily Herald, September 8, 1937.

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No. 259

To the American Chargé d'Affaires ad interim, Cairo.

The Secretary of State transmits for the information of the Chargé d'Affaires ad interim a copy of an article which appeared in the London <u>Daily Herald</u> of September 8, 1937, concerning recent Italian military activity in Lybia.

The Chargé d'Affaires is requested to forward at his convenience such information as he may be able discreetly to obtain concerning the activity to which the article makes reference.

A similar instruction is being sent to the Embassies at London and Rome.

Enclosure:

Article from London Daily Herald, September 8, 1937.

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THE FOREIGN SERVICE

OF THE

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

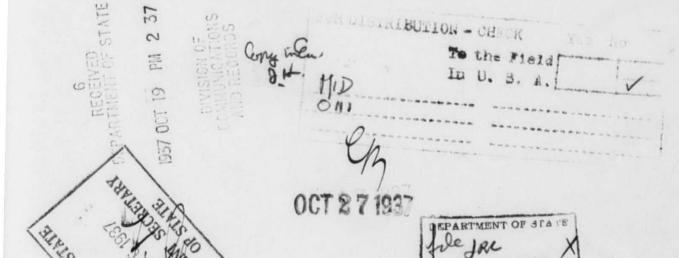
NOV ROME, October 8, 1937.

MERICAN EMBASSY

DIVISION OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS

No. 599

Subject: Formation in Libya of a new Army Corps.



The Honerable

Secretary of State,

Washington.

Sir:

With reference to my despatch No. 582 of September 27, 1937, I have the honor to quote below from a memorandum prepared by the Military Attaché to the Embassy concerning rumors of reinforcements currently being despatched to Libya:

> "There appears to be in process of formation in Libya a new army corps, the 21st. Our information is very meagre at present but it is thought that this new corps will be located in Circuaica with headquarters at Bengasi and will consist of corps troops and services and two divisions, the 62nd 'MARMARICA' transferred from the 20th Corps

and ...

and the 63rd 'CIRENE' newly formed. The 20th Corps, formation of which is just being completed, will be located entirely in Tripolitania with headquarters at Tripoli and will consist of corps troops, services and the 60th 'SABRATA' and 61st 'SIRTE' Divisions.

This change in organization will increase the regular troops in Libya from an estimated 50,000 to an estimated 80,000 exclusive of the Royal Corps of Colonial Troops of Libya numbering now about 25,000."

The Assistant Military Attaché adds that confirmation of the above information is impossible and that his memorandum is based very largely upon minute examination of certain changes in the designation of officers to new commands.

In the above connection, a notice carried in L'INFORMAZIONE DIPLOMATICE was reprinted in the Italian press this evening stating that there was evidence of increasing surprise in Egypt concerning Italian troop movements to Libya. The notice continues:

"It is not inopportune to restate that the decision to transfer an Army Corps to Libya was made by the Council of Ministers last April and did not then arouse any undue agitation in Egypt. These days the decision is being translated into action by the arrival in Libya of the troops designated. Besides, if circumstances will impose on Italy the necessity to send other troops, this need not alarm Egypt in any way. The Egyptian

government knows very well that Italian policy toward their country is inspired by a sense of absolutely loyal friendship and that it has nothing to fear from us. It is only for reasons of an international character -- outside of the position and policy as regards Egypt -- that Italy reinforces and, if necessary, will reinforce later its garrisons in Libya."

Respectfully yours,

Edward L. Reed, Chargé d'Affaires ad interim.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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DIVISION OF NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS

S - Mr. Secretary

U - Under Secretary

A-W - Mr Wilson

OCT 26 1937

OCT 2 6 1937
DIVISION OF
NEAR EASTERN AFFAIRS

RRISON IN LYBIA

REINFORCEMENT OF ITALIAN GARRISON IN LYBIA ROME EMBASSY'S NO. 599 OF OCTOBER 8, 1937.

MR. WILSON

The Rome Embassy forwards, in a despatch dated October 8 1937, extracts from a memorandum prepared by the Assistant Military Attaché concerning the formation of a new Italian army corps in Lybia (about which there has been much in the American press) with headquarters at Bengasi (some 500 miles as the crow flies from the Egyptian border). It is estimated that the change in organization will increase the number of regular troops in Lybia from 50,000 to 80,000, exclusive of the Royal Corps of Colonial Troops of Lybia numbering now some 25,000.

Diplomatice according to which the decision to transfer an army corps to Lybia was reached by the Council of Ministers in April. It is added in the notice Egypt should not be alarmed by this action or by the necessity which may be imposed upon Italy to send other troops as Italian policy towards Egypt is inspired by "absolutely loyal friendship and it has nothing to fear from us." The explanation is

made

made that "It is only for reasons of an international character - outside of the position and policy as regards

Egypt - that Italy reinforces and, if necessary, will reinforce later its garrisons in Lybia."

Commenting upon the reports of the reinforcement of the Lybian garrison by Italy the Legation in Cairo under date of October 6th stated that:

"Egyptian military preparations are going forward steadily along the Lybian border, under the direction of the British Military Mission, but the Legation has been informed that no plans for enlarging the program in this area have yet been seriously considered. The principal work now in progress is a military road from Alexandria to Solloum (the Egypto-Lybian frontier) via Mersa Matruk (a work contemplated since 1935).

883.764

These are the first official despatches we have received on this subject. Under date of September 8th the London Daily Herald published the first press information concerning the strengthening of the Italian garrison in Lybia which had come to the notice of this Division and, upon its receipt from London, an instruction was sent to the Embassies in London and Rome and the Legation in Cairo requesting any particulars which might be obtained in confirmation.

The Military Intelligence Division of the War Department considers the reinforcement of the Lybian garrison as due to one of two motives:

1) Political, in serving as a threat to French colonial

possessions in North Africa west of Lybia and to British interests in Egypt and the Sudan on the east; or

2) For Italian military purposes in enabling the troops to be seasoned in Lybia preparatory to being sent, in part, to Ethiopia.

That Italy does not contemplate their effective use in Lybia against either France or Great Britain is said to be indicated in the fact that the troops are being equipped not for desert service but for garrison duty.

M. I. D. does not believe the troops are contemplated for use in Spain owing to the fact that their transportation to Lybia preparatory to being sent to Spain would involve a doubling back of transports and a consequent additional expenditure of fuel at a time when Italy is hard pressed for both coal and fuel oil.

Wallace Murray

865_{D.20/14}

NE JRC/EG

Jan

DOCUMENT FILE NOTE

SEE 883.00 General cond	itions/68 FOR	#1087
FROM Egypt	(_Allen)	DATED Oct.6, 1937
го	NAME	11127

REGARDING:

Italian reenforcements in Libya.

Rumors of - appear definitely to have been established. Egyptian preparations along the Libyan border.

\$ /C 865C.20/9

DOCUMENT FILE NOTE

SEE .	883.20/36	FOR <u>letter</u>	
FRON	/k	(Morris) DATE	o Oct.18, 1937
то	Egypt	NAME	1—1127 • • • •

REGARDING:

Report on speeding up of Egyptian defense plans desired in connection with reported increased Italian military activity in Libya.



LEGATION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Alexandria, October 15, 1937.

No. 1094.

Subject: Egypt and the Mediterranean Situation.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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O. N. I.

The Honorable

The Secretary of State,

Washington.

Copy Transmitted by The Commercial Office (A-M/O)

Department that as

To

I have the honor to inform the Department that as a result of the recent dispatch of additional Italian troops to Libya, the international situation in the Mediterranean has come to overshadow, at least for the moment, all other problems in Egypt. The frequent recurrence of difficulties in the Mediterranean during the past two years, each of which has been surmounted sufficiently to

avoid a major European war, has lead many observers to discount the present tense situation. However, the fact that 24,000 regular Italian troops are officially admitted from Rome to have been dispatched to Libya since September 20th is a tangible danger that has aroused undisguised anxiety in Egypt.

Last April the Italian Government announced the intention of establishing in Libya a full army corps of three divisions "whenever the international situation so requires". On September 20th, five months later, the headquarters staff of the 20th Army Corps sailed from Naples. This corps was then announced to comprise 40,000 men of the Sirte, Sarathe, and Marica Divisions. Yesterday, however, it was admitted in Naples that the headquarters staff of the Circue Division had also sailed for Libya, and that four divisions would be stationed there, comprising 60,000 regular Italian troops, including all military branches necessary for an expedition. There are said to be in addition 12,000 native troops in Libya. The native troops are said to have been sent largely to the interior posts at Jaraboub, Kufra, and Ghaboub Oasis (ceded to Italy a few years ago), while the regular troops are maintained pricipally on the coast.

Prior to the Ethiopian troubles, the regular Italian establishment in Libya is believed to have consisted of 20,000 troops, a large number of whom were natives. A British military authority has estimated that at the height of the Ethiopian War, Italian effectives in Libya reached 67,000, but that after the War this number was reduced to about the pre-war status.

In an effort to remove Egyptian fears resulting from the recent dispatch of troops to Libya, an official communique was issued in Rome on October 7th, stating that the decision to transfer an army corps to Libya was taken by the Italian Cabinet last April, when the decision did not arouse any appreciable excitement in Egypt. The communique adds that the decision is now being implemented and if circumstances necessitate it Italy will send further troops, but that such should not alarm Egypt. The following significant statement is quoted from the communique:

"The Egyptian Government knows perfectly well that Italy's policy in respect to Egypt is inspired by a sense of absolutely loyal friendship, therefore they have nothing to fear from us. It is only through necessities of an international character - extraneous to the position and policies of Egypt - that Italy is reenforcing, and if necessary will further reenforce, her garrison in Libya".

Italy has, therefore, admitted that the present international situation had determined her recent activity in Libya, and that the dispatch of troops is not entirely a routine execution of the decision taken last April. It is for this reason that the British Military Mission in Egypt believes that the "unreasonable" large number of troops involved indicates that Italy may be preparing for active military aggression. General J. H. M. Cornwall, the Chief of the Mission, is understood to have recommended to the War Office in London during the past few days that additional British troops be dispatched to Egypt and that the military preparations of the Egyptian Government be hastened.

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There are at present approximately 10,000 British

troops in Egypt, most of whom are intended for the protection of the Suez Canal, although their concentration in the Canal Zone, as provided by the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of Alliance, has not yet begun and they are scattered through Egypt, stationed largely in Alexandria, Cairo, and Ismailia.

The present garrison at Solloum, the Egyptian post on the Libyan-Egyptian frontier, is reliably reported to consist of only a small detachment of Egyptian troops. The First Secretary of the British Embassy in Egypt, who returned yesterday from a trip to Mersa Matruh and Siwa, has informed the Legation that there is very little evidence of military activity in that area west of Alexandria. The road from Alexandria to Mersa Matruh, while safe enough in dry weather, is very poor and requires careful drivers. The only evidence of work on this road consists of a few piles of stones scattered at intervals, preparatory to the building of a roadbed.

9650.248

In Libya there is said to be an excellent road to the Egyptian frontier, and the Italian Army has recently established an airport at El Gabel El Akhdar, opposite Solloum. Further airports are reported as under construction at Jaraboub and Kufra, ostensibly in preparation for a commercial air line from Tripoli via the Sudan to Ethiopia. However, the commercial air traffic on this route will admittedly be small for many years, and the extensive preparations have increased the ability of Italy to attack Egypt from the west. While some Italian activities are reported at Gharlan, near the Tunisian frontier, most of the activity

would appear to be directed towards Egypt and the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

These activities force Egypt to adhere closely to its alliance with Great Britain. As a result of them, the Italian Government appears to be effectively counteracting its propaganda of friendship towards Egypt and the Arab peoples. Many observers are inclined to believe that Italy might meet with some success in its efforts to win Egypt from her close association with Great Britain were it not for these military movements. Although the efforts of Mussolini to appear as the protector of Islam have been fruitless, there is nevertheless much fanatical hatred of Communism in Egypt, and in the event of a world alinement between the democratic powers and Russia against the Fascist Group, there would probably be considerable sentiment in Egypt in favor of the latter. Furthermore Nahas Pasha, the Egyptian Prime Minister, is known to be an admirer of Mussolini, and is inclined himself to covet the efficiency of a fascist regime. These considerations, however, appear insignificant in the face of the actual Italian military activities in Libya.

Respectfully yours,

George V. Allen

Charge d'Affaires ad interim

file no. 710/720/800 GVA/icg

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Central File: Decimal File 865C.20, Internal Affairs Of States, Military Affairs. Army. Army Posts. Fortifications. Defenses. Military Instructors (Advisers). (** Country In Which Serving.), Sep. 18, 1935 - Oct. 15, 1937. September 18, 1935 - October 15, 1937. MS European Colonialism in the Early 20th Century. National Archives (United States). Archives Unbound, link.gale.com%2Fapps%2Fdoc %2FSC5109732264%2FGDSC%3Fu%3Domni%26sid%3Dbookmark-GDSC. Accessed 18 June 2025.